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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines several facets of everyday perspectives on merit and the meritocratic allocation of rewards and opportunities, focusing on race-targeted, affirmative action admissions of Blacks and Latinos to law schools, medical schools, and Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs. Subjects were 32 white, male college students, aged 20 to 35 years, who were in or were considering these fields of study at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Subjects came from working class/blue collar and professional/managerial families of origin. Subjects were asked to consider and discuss the merits of nine different approaches to achieving student-body diversity; three involved quotas or targets. Most striking from the results was the degree of common ground, up and down the policy preference spectrum, among these men of diverse lifestyles and political perspectives. Yet there was substantial disagreement on the nature of professional/managerial merit, how it should be measured, and the salience of merit to the equitable distribution of career opportunities. Of primary concern was the issue of collective utility or the consequences for health care, jurisprudence, economic growth, and the general welfare if those of insufficient capacity were to achieve critical positions in the professions or the business community. Principal issues included whether Blacks and Latinos already enjoy a fair chance to achieve their potentials and how far collective accountability should extend to ensure that they do. Actual responses are included. (Contains 16 references.) (NAV)

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ED 394 433

THE RIGHT STUFF:

White Male Perspectives on Merit, Measurement, and Affirmative Action Admissions to Graduate Professional Schools

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April, 1996

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> With the best of intentions...the University of Texas School of Law...discriminates in favor of...blacks and Mexican Americans...The question we decide today...is whether the Fourteenth Amendment permits the school to discriminate in this way. We hold that it does not.
>
> --*Hopwood* et al. v. *The University of Texas, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, March, 1996*

In the course of a vociferous and enduring controversy over affirmative action in this country, it is not surprising that legal disputes, public protest, and media attention have repeatedly focused on race-targeted affirmative action admissions to law schools and medical schools (Lipset & Schneider, 1978; Rosenfeld, 1991; Jaschik & Lederman, 1996). In conjunction with the more prestigious MBA programs,[1] law schools and medical schools provide entree to the most lucrative, most influential spheres and strata of the American work force. Critical arbiters of economic opportunity, these institutions continue to generate intense competition for a limited number of places--as well as persistent demands for racial equity.

Over the past three decades, colleges and universities have employed a number of strategies to achieve more diverse student bodies. A principle obstacle, however, to more proportionate representation of blacks and Latinos is their undergraduate grades and admissions test scores--traditionally, the principle criteria for admissions decisions--tend to be considerably lower than those of whites or Asians. This has prompted a variety of what might be called "supply-side" initiatives: through race-targeted outreach to school children and race-targeted interventions with undergraduates, graduate professional schools can "prime the pump," enhancing the competitiveness of applicants of color, and encouraging greater numbers of talent young people to pursue graduate professionals study. At the same time, considerations of professional promise as well as racial equity have encouraged a great many schools to give more weight to a broader range of admissions criteria, thus offsetting to some extent any special obstacles that grades and test scores may pose to applicants of color. What has drawn the most fire from critics, however, is affirmative action admissions proper: that is, the use of race itself as an admissions criterion, such that blacks and Latinos "less qualified" on other grounds are nonetheless be admitted ahead of "better qualified" whites. As what has been dubbed "Bakke II" wends it way toward the Supreme Court, California readies itself for a critical plebiscite, and state legislatures across the country consider new injunctions against race-targeted policies of any kind, those concerned for the political viability of affirmative action admissions would do well to reexamine it within the framework of "everyday"

[1] In this paper, 'MBA' is employed generically to denote all master's programs in business management.

American constructions of distributive justice.

A substantial body of survey research on public opinion suggests widespread ambivalence toward affirmative action generally among the American public (e.g. Costantini & King, 1985; Schuman, Steeh & Bobo, 1995; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Policy ratings may vary considerably as a function of item wording, or in relation to the precise policy tendered. Ratings on any given policy, however, tend to vary across respondents in a manner consistent with expressed political and economic beliefs and values. Those less amenable to affirmative action, and other redistributive policies such as "welfare," are seen to adhere more strongly to "meritocratic-individualistic" world views: For example, they are more likely to believe that interpersonal or intergroup differences in economic outcomes follow from differences in effort, motivation, or intrinsic talent. Advocates of these policies, on the other hand, are less likely to challenge the equity of gross inequalities of wealth and income, and to credit environmental or structural factors for gross inequalities of outcomes between racial groups.

There are some difficulties, however, with this line of research. A persistent preoccupation with "final causes"--Are policy preference differentials "really" a function of ideological differences, or are ideological arguments against affirmative action essentially a mask for white self-interest, or for negative affect toward members of other races? (e.g. Bobo, 1988; Jackman and Muha, 1984; Sears, 1988; Sniderman, Piazza, Tetlock & Kendrick, 1991; Peterson, 1994)--seems to have diverted the attention of researchers from a more thorough-going ideological analysis. A great deal is made of the alleged paradox of virtually consensual affirmations of equality of opportunity in principle in conjunction with substantial resistance to liberal policies thought to advance it; yet another apparent paradox has drawn little attention: The putative linkage between resistance to affirmative action and so-called "hegemonic" values like meritocracy and individualism does not square with the historical origins of affirmative action, which grew out of a civil rights movement firmly grounded in meritocratic-individualistic notions of distributive equity, its rhetoric laden with meritocratic-individualistic appeals for "equality of opportunity," for equitable handicapping on a "level playing field," for judging a man "not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character."

Whatever the final causes of policy preferences, the critical role of ideological arguments in the defense and advancement of various positions remains undisputed, and invites further exploration of the precise ideological frameworks of affirmative action advocacy and opposition.. Toward this end, the present,

exploratory study examines several facets of "everyday" perspectives on merit and the meritocratic allocation of rewards and opportunities. What is "merit," anyway? Where does it come from? What is its precise salience to ordinary notions of distributive equity? How well do traditional meritocratic measures actually measure what counts, or what ought to count? Do advocates of affirmative action tend to place less stock in merit--or construct merit or meritocratic allocation in a somewhat different way from opponents? On the other hand, what sorts of ideological dilemmas help to fuel *intra*personal conflicts concerning the justice of these policies?

With a particular focus on race-targeted affirmative action admissions of blacks and Latinos to law schools, medical schools, and MBA programs, I sought the perspectives of affirmative actions advocates and opponents with some considerable stake in the policies in question: that is, white male college students hoping to earn a MD, JD, or MBA themselves.

METHODOLOGY

Data was drawn from semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with 32 unpaid volunteers. Interviewed in the summer of 1992, these men were recruited in the course of a related, mixed-race, mixed-gender survey of about 1600 students enrolled at the University of Illinois at Chicago, a demographically diverse "Research I" campus located about one mile west of Chicago's downtown "Loop" area.

Three of the subjects were between 29 and 35 years of age, and the balance between 20 and 26; four had served a few years in the military; and all had substantial full-time or part-time work experience. The group was about evenly divided between working class/blue collar and professional/managerial families of origin, and between Chicagoans, Chicago-area suburbanites, and men from other parts of the state or other parts of the country. About a third were "WASPs," more or less, and the balance "white ethnics;" three had immigrated to this country as young children, and two as teenagers.

With the help of their survey responses, the interview sample was deliberately split down the middle on the issue of affirmative action admissions, and divided as evenly as possible among three general areas of aspiration. Comprised of 11 pre-meds, 11 MBA prospects, eight men who were seriously considering law school, and two more who anticipated further study in both law and business, the sample included 10 undergraduate majors in economics and/or applied business disciplines, 11 natural sciences majors, and eight humanities and social sciences majors, as well as one each in engineering and allied health professions, and one

double-major in a business-related discipline and one of the applied arts. Three of the men had already earned a B.A. or B.S. but were taking additional undergraduate courses in order to qualify for medical school, including one who was halfway through a second bachelor's degree; the balance of the sample including seven sophomores, 13 juniors, and nine seniors.

In the course of the interviews, subjects had been asked to consider the merits of nine different approaches achieving student-body diversity, which were designed to encapsulate a range of real-world alternatives put in place over the past three decades (Klitgard, 1985; Twale, Douvanis & Sekula, 1991; Jaschik, 1995)introduced by American colleges and universities employed by both graduate and undergraduate more or less mirroring the range of alternatives introduced by both graduate and undergraduate in the context of whichever type of graduate professional education they themselves aspired it. Three of these involved quotas or targets: In one model, no minimum standards were applied to blacks or Latinos; in another, race-neutral criterion-cutoffs would be employed; and a third model employed race-normed criterion cutoffs for blacks and Latinos (that is, members of each racial group would be required to achieve the same percentile rank within their own group.)

Another policy option involved changes in admissions criteria, or their relative weighting by admissions committees; relatively qualitative criteria such as interviews, work histories, life histories, and letters of recommendation would receive somewhat greater weight than is customarily assigned to them, and grades or test scores somewhat less weight. Yet another alternative of particular relevance to the present study was an admissions lottery, open to all 4-year-degree holders and graduating seniors, or in the case of medical schools, to all of those who had earned passing grades in the pre-medical curriculum. The remaining options included race-targeted recruiting; various initiatives to enhance the competitiveness of school children or undergraduates, including academic remediation or enrichment programs, field trips, mentorships, and the like; and a "color-blind" policy offering "no special consideration" to any category of applicants or prospective applicants. The subjects were also invited to recommend their own policy alternatives, or any modifications in the options presented to them that would make them more attractive.

Facilitating an analysis of perspectives on specific policy features--e.g., deviations from color-blindness; deviations from traditional criteria; deviations of meritocratic selection altogether--this array of options also helped to tease out any ideological common ground. For example, the same arguments might be

used to justify affirmative action admissions proper and race-targeted supply-side alternatives. Conversely, some of the arguments raised against affirmative action *in general* by its staunchest opponents might also be put forth by proponents, in reaction to more extreme alternatives such as absolute quotas or admissions lotteries.In this manner, I hoped to highlight some of the intrapersonal dilemmas surrounding the affirmative action controversy, and at the same time lay bear some genuine differences in perspective associated with different policy preferences.

Asked to discuss his response to each policy, each subject was also was also required to rate each policy except the lottery (presented in a different section of the interview) on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5="very acceptable to me" to 1="not at all acceptable." He was also asked to indicate which if any of these types of policies he would endorse if he was "in charge" of the admissions process; to discuss why some ratings were higher than others; and to explain why some policies merited only qualified acceptance or rejection.

Elsewhere in these interviews, two questions were designed to elicit the subjects' preferences regarding admissions criteria, as well as working definitions of professional/managerial merit.

> Let's just pretend, for a moment, that affirmative action was no longer an issue, that racial diversity was not something that law schools/medical schools/MBA programs had to think about. Admissions committees would still have to choose among different applicants, based on who they thought would do the best in school, and who would make the best doctors/lawyers/executives. If it was up to you--if you were in charge and you could make up the rules--how would you decide whom to admit? . . . What criteria would you use?
>
> How would you describe a good lawyer/a good doctor/an effective business executive?

Having responded to these questions, each subject was asked to assess the efficacy of grades, test scores, and any other admissions criteria he had recommended in relation to each aspect of merit he had cited.

Other issues addressed in the interview included the possibility of grades' and test scores' predictive bias; sources of inequality of academic and economic outcomes between different racial and ethnic groups; and the college experience of blacks and Latinos as compared with whites. For the most part, arguments tending to favor or to oppose affirmative action admissions were brought to the table by the subjects themselves. At the same time, several arguments commonly raised in the course of the affirmative action controversy were presented for the consideration of those subjects who had not raised these issues on their own--for example, the putative links between racism and inequality of outcomes; the putative similarity between the American experience of blacks, Latinos, and white ethnics; the putative "urban mission" of urban institutions of higher

learning; and the possible benefits to blacks and Latinos generally of better representation among professionals and managers. The issue of item or construct bias in standardized graduate professional admissions tests was framed as follows:

> Some people feel that even if an African American or a Latino knows as much, or has the same level of ability, as a white person, the white person will still tend to do *better* on the LSAT/MCAT/GMAT, just because of the way some of the items are worded, or the way the test is put together. Do you think that's true?

Keeping the diction colloquial, the interview protocol also solicited the subjects' constructions of success and failure generally.

> Some people feel that we are very much a product of our environments, and you can't really blame somebody from a bad environment if they don't succeed in life. On the other hand, everybody's got problems, and some people feel that if a person is really talented and really wants to get ahead, then it's up to them to overcome the obstacles and do what they have to do to make something of themselves. Where do you stand?
>
> I'd like you to think about some of the white adults you've gotten to know fairly well--your parents, older sisters or brothers, maybe, aunts and uncles, neighbors, teachers, people you've worked with or worked for. Try and think of some people who've been pretty successful in life, as well as some who just never really "made it." What made the difference, in your opinion?

Analysis of the data is largely thematic and interpretive, employing numerous representative selections from the interview transcripts to illustrate the range and nuances of the subjects' perspectives. This is complemented, however, by quantitative comparisons regarding the relative frequency of certain perspectives among affirmative action admissions advocates and opponents. "Advocates" include 14 men who endorsed, and rated positively (4 or 5), one or more of the quota options, plus two more men who eschewed the use of formal quotas, but nonetheless felt that race should be taken into account in admissions decisions. The 16 "opponents" withheld both endorsements and positive ratings from any policy that involved marginal preferences for blacks and Latinos at the point of admission.[2]

While the nature of the sample, the data collection, and the analysis preclude legitimate statistical inferences to a larger population, some descriptive statistics are provided in two tables. Selected as items in

[2] In the manner of Rosenfeld (1991), I employ the terms *marginal* preferences, marginal equality, and so forth to refer to the treatment of individuals at a particular point in time, in the context of particular procedures. In the larger scheme of things, of course, it may be argued that blacks and Latinos suffer so many disadvantages in relation to whites that affirmative action merely helps to even the scales, and thus is not preferential in any absolute sense.

these table are reasonably discrete, clearly defined issues and arguments that were either included in the interview protocol or were brought to the table by a substantial proportion of the subjects, and in relation to which the data lent itself fairly readily to "did he or didn't he" decisions on the part of the researcher.

The dichotomous character of this analysis does not obviate considerable variations in precise policy preferences within both halves of the sample. For example, one man limited his endorsement of racial targets and marginal preferences to medical schools, law medical schools, and a very few other graduate programs that, in his view, might thereby enhance the availability of critical services to underserved inner-city minority populations. Another subject placed restrictions on the beneficiaries of affirmative action admissions, which he believed should target only the descendants of African slaves in the American South, and not other blacks, or any Latinos at all. On the other hand, four opponents as well as 14 advocates endorsed various race-targeted initiatives among undergraduates likely to stimulate the interest or enhance the competitiveness of black and Latino applicants to graduate professional schools; while one opponent explicitly endorsed *class*-targeted affirmative action admissions.

Nonetheless, dichotomous comparisons seemed in tune with the subjects' perspectives, as well as my own: A close reading of the data revealed the general recognition of a qualitative leap between race-targeted affirmative action admissions proper and other kinds of pro-active policies. With just two exceptions, moreover, a more complex, more cumbersome breakdown of the sample did not yield any clearer picture of the relationship between policy preferences and ideology. Those exceptions, however, have some interesting implications which I address in the narrative.

FINDINGS

What was perhaps most striking about this study's findings was the degree of common ground, up and down the policy preference spectrum, among men of diverse lifestyles and political perspectives. Marxist or Libertarian, trade-unionist Democrat or Heritage Foundation Republican, counter-culturalist "slacker," fraternity Veep, or driven corporate climber, there was little substantial disagreement on the nature of professional/managerial merit, how it should be measured, and the salience of merit to the equitable distribution of career opportunities.

A meritocratic-individualistic ethos

As illustrated in Table 1, all of the subjects defended the use of merit as an admissions criterion, and wished to avoid excessive deviations from meritocratic selection. Of primary concern was the issue of collective utility--that is, the consequences for health care, jurisprudence, economic growth, and the general welfare if those of insufficient capacity were to achieve critical positions in the professions or the business community.

TABLE 1: Concordant Perspectives on Merit and Measurement

	Affirmative Action Advocates	Opponents
Color-blindness and/or marginal procedural equality valued	15	16
Excessive departures from colorblind, meritocratic, marginal equality would tend to compromise professional/managerial performance	14	15
Affirmative action might jeopardize minority self-esteem and/or self-actualization	13	14
Grades and/or standardized test scores valuable measures/predictors of motivation[a]	9	7
Hard work/achievement motivation should be rewarded/should be admissions criteria	11	12
Attributes of exemplary executives/professionals include . . .		
Superior intellect, creativity, etc.	10	9
Exceptional personality, empathy, "people skills"	10	13
Character, commitment to others, etc.	9	10
Achievement motivation	7	7
Lower undergraduate grade point averages and standardized tests scores among blacks and Latinos than among whites, on the average, attributed at least in part to . . .		
Poverty/economics	14	11
Stress, frustration, lack of self-efficacy	16	11
Peer group and/or community sociocultural milieu	12	12
Aspects of family life/parent-child interaction		

[a] Include responses to specific either-or/yes-or-no questions in protocol, as well as instances when the issue was first raised by the subject.

> Who do *I* want cutting *me* open? I mean, I don't *want* a doctor who's been allowed to slip on through just because of some superfluous issue like race.
>
> It's that upper tier of [business executives] that *creates* so many *other* jobs, and new industries. I don't want somebody incompetent up there who's gonna *blow up* a quarter of a million jobs.
>
> If [law school graduates] are supposed to be leading, you know, the leaders of this country, then let [the best qualified] lead, let them expand the horizons of the rest of us, and help the others.
>
> [With a lottery,] people are not put into positions that they have an aptitude for or have an inherent skill to do. I am not gonna send somebody who can't add 2 + 2 into an engineering field or a physics field, and take somebody that's Sir Isaac Newton at 17 years of age and put them into something that was an advertising role, or as an artist...What society is trying to do is get the *most* out of the resources that it uses. Putting people into a particular field that they have no aptitude for...could *undermine* society.

Meritocratic competition was, moreover, a useful incentive for superior performance. To the extent that this was circumvented, not only would many whites be demoralized, but blacks and Latinos might thereby fail to achieve both the psychic and economic benefits of self-actualization, whether as individuals and as ethnic groups.

> By *getting* these quotas, you're gonna strive to achieve a *lower* status....I mean...Where a white male says, 'Well, I have to have a GPA of 4.5 [to be accepted to medical school],' he's gonna work to have that; whereas a *black* male says, 'Well, I have to have a GPA of 4.2. So *he's* gonna work to get that GPA of 4.2.'...In a way that's *hurting* them because...you're *enforcing* this diversity...it *keeps* them [unequal]. It keeps the status quo....The goal is to achieve a common ground....I think it's bad for a social group to strive to achieve less that anybody else.

Another man agreed that people may "kind of not try their best [if] they know they're gonna make it anyway, either to fill a quota or something else." Speaking from his experience as an employee of a prominent computer firm, he recalled a Latino co-worker who had been seeking a particular promotion.

> Once he found out that...they needed some Latinos for this *specific* position, and that no matter what, he would get it, he *definitely* didn't work as hard, didn't do his best he could....I don't think he's gonna be able to advance in the future, as far as, uh, he'd be able to.

There was general perception, moreover, that most people *prefer* to "make it on their own," and have less respect for those seen to have enjoyed "a free ride."

> I think [affirmative action is] insulting to blacks...It's like saying, well, because you're black, you can be stupider....Welcome to our university, and we know you really can't cut it with whites, and so we're gonna, you know, give you a little extra edge here or there and bring you up to their standards. (Gil)

> I have to admit that sometimes I do that myself, not necessarily saying, 'Well, he *must* have gotten there because of affirmative action,' but saying, 'I wonder *if* it was affirmative action,' I gotta admit, or if that's person's really capable.

Thus affirmative action was perhaps *most* unfair to its most meritorious targets.

> If someone tells a black or Latino, you're only here because of an affirmative action program, then what they did to achieve to get to that level's kind of devalued. It's like saying, you got an A on the test *but* because you're white, we graded it on a little lower scale than everybody else. So, yeah, you got an A...but not really. You know, it...makes them feel like, well, I really didn't *earn* to get here. . . . It didn't make any difference that I had to spend my nights studying during the week and that I took two jobs. It's simply because I'm black. You know, it's not right. That's not why they're there.
>
> A black student that is a super-achiever--which there are a number of--how is that fair to him, to say once again that he was set apart, in some way? There was already a place for him....[Quotas] totally takes away from the great doctor that he could be. You know, he would make it if everybody was judged on the same criteria, and so to have anything less for him...really devalues the hard effort and work he's put in.
>
> [A Mexican-American classmate] was [ranked] number one out of everybody [in a competition for a National Science Foundation scholarship]....[But] instead of giving him the number one over all, they gave him the Mexican NSF, so I guess they set aside, you know, so many for minorities. And that's kind of a slap in the face, that they have to give you the Mexican one 'cause you're Mexican, they can't give you--You can't compete against anybody else, you have to compete against other people of your ethnic--you know, um. And then you don't have to do as well, either. And when people see that...that takes away from a lot of people.

On the other hand, bending the rules too far to advance diversity might in the end be especially devastating to *less* capable blacks or Latinos. A man employed by a church-related organization that sponsored inner-city outreach recalled some recent correspondence from the Atlanta office.

> It was talking about an inner-city woman who was lower class and black and who they had promoted to manager...They were very excited about promoting her....And they found out later that she was not [qualified]--that's not where her talents lay, that's not where she flourished. They were most happy about wanting to help empower someone and move someone up the economic ladder. But she foundered and eventually had to be taken out of the position. And that's--I mean, I really don't want to emphasize self-esteem, but, I mean, that *was* a blow to her self-esteem....they were not wise about their charity...[and] she...benefitted least from it.

One student-government veteran with some insider knowledge of campus governance felt that due consideration for blacks' and Latinos' self-esteem argued against the elimination of official minimums.

> If your [racial] target was not met, you [could] obviously have a waiver....There are waivers for income tax; there are waivers for medical exams; there are waivers for *everything*....But even if it's just a cloak and dagger minimum standard that might not be met, you still offer the dignity of the individual that has to meet the minimum standard.

Meritocracy, it seemed, served everyone's interests. But just But just *what* standards should individuals be expected to meet?

The nature of merit

Describing the best lawyers and physicians, or the most effective business executives, the need for vocation-specific expertise was not ignored.

> [An exemplary physician] would, one, have to know what he's doing, 'cause no matter how good a person you are, it won't do squat if you can't do your job.

Separating the sheep from the goats, however, were more generic aspects of personality and "people skills," "character" and "commitment," at least as much as superior intelligence, analytical ability, creating problem-solving, or the like. Medicine especially demanded a good deal of empathy, of human sensitivity, and not just technical mastery.

> A good doctor is somebody who's very adept at...the scientific skills of understanding working physiology, say, and chemistry is involved and all that, and even the physics of chemistry, and that's a very important criterion. But there's a lot of the human side of it, of just being concerned...doing the nurse things. . . . I think a lot of doctors, they don't look at the patient as a person. They become an automaton looking at a case, a physical case, a specimen, and I think there's a tendency to do that....A lot of doctors seem to be very nice, but a lot of it's bullshit, like, they're really pretending, and it's really obvious.
>
> I have a seven-year-old brother. Two weeks ago...he had a pain in his leg, he went in, the doctor, before my mother even left, the doctor told my mother that my brother might have leukemia, before he did any tests, any kind of--anything at all. . . It was, like, on a Friday, and she was an absolute wreck all weekend. . . . I'm, like, "You're never taking him back there again!" . . . It came up negative. Everything was fine. He had, like, pulled a groin muscle, and this guy was diagnosing leukemia. . . They're around it so much...you have to turn it off, as far as yourself [as a physician] goes, but when you're presenting it to the family of the person, you *can't* be unsympathetic, you can't be cold, you gotta be, you know.
>
> There's more to being a doctor than simply having all the statistics logged in your head, and being able to remember everything that you've learned. I mean, granted the MCAT..and..the school work that's been done is very important....But...I think they're thinking of [more qualitative criteria] right now, because they're finding that they're getting doctors who get up and...can't communicate with people, and yet they're supposed to be someone that deals with people every day.

One pre-med with a special interest in osteopathic medicine explained,

> The doctor is supposed to help the body cure itself, so in that sense, the doctor should be able to look at the body, and be able to see what's wrong...and so [a physician needs] good deductive capabilities. And...in any leader or anything, you have to be able to help the person--

you have to help the person to *think* that he's gonna be better, 'cause...I think that there's a lot that the psyche does to influence the way the body acts. And you can see that with depression and stress. And, um, so I think in that sense a cheerleader, or a, um, or friendship skills, too, is also really important.

Not "friendship," exactly, but similar kinds of human relations skills were essential to effective business management.

> The manager would have to have very good human skills . . . Interpersonal skills, in order to deal with subordinates at all levels. In order to deal with corporate headquarters...buyers, customers, everybody. . . . To be able to deal with the janitor that cannot acquire a mop-head from the Purchasing Department, and at the same time turn around and deal with...the impact of a new financial situation...And being able to have that perspective and essential understanding that this person's problem is that person's world, and that's what that person needs to deal with. And this financial officer has this billion dollars that he really needs real fast, and how to help *that* person...Those problems should be just as important [the hotel manager] because they are important to the subordinate. (a prospective hotel executive)

> Our particular store manager [where I work] treats people like they're garbage....I got into an argument with him, and you know, I told him I respect what you *wanna* do, but...when you treat people bad, they'll do things when you tell 'em to do it, but they won't go out of their way. . . . If somebody does a good job...you don't necessarily have to...put it on their [pay]check or anything like that, but just come up 'em and say, 'Hey, you're doing a good job...keep up the good work,' something like that...You obtain the loyalty of that person, so, you know, that they're willing to do...[what they are told to] and more, if necessary....to do better, to make [your boss] look good....If you want to be an effective leader, you have to have loyalty and everything, and loyalty comes from...listening to people, communicating with people, listening to their input, and, I mean, you know, not [just] being focused to your own objectives.

> In order for [the subordinate] to be good, you have to have absolute trust in your management. You put so much faith in what they tell you to do....Your management has to be totally honest with you, and it's more important for them to be honest with you when you're doing something *wrong* than right. Right's easy. Anybody can say, good job. It's the wrong I hate. "This is what you did wrong with a situation. Here's what you need to improve on. You do these things, we can get you a promotion." But there's where we get too many managers take the easy way out, which is simply to say, "Oh, yeah, sure, you did a fine job." You know, most of the time, you're left behind.

On the other hand, professional/managerial excellence also entailed a certain degree of "impression management"--a healthy balance, one might say, between Mother Teresa and Niccolo Machiavelli.

> A lawyer just has to have a greater understanding of what people are thinking [than a businessman executive]...and how do you play off those things.

> They have to have a certain level of arrogance, I think to be a good doctor. Not arrogance--Yeah, arrogance, you know. "I'm the best in the world"--but they gotta be able to back it up, you know....That self-assuredness rubs off on the patient: "Well, I'm being taken care of by the best," you know.

One of the biggest issues, I think...is being able to work with somebody. We spend some long hours here, and if I wasn't able to work with some other business professional here, I would not enjoy it at all. Um, I think from a management perspective, you have to have a great human understanding....You [also] have to understand the politics of inter-office workings.

You've gotta have a certain amount of confidence [as a lawyer]....You can't be a timid person...[but rather] almost oblivious to any type of embarrassment, you see what I'm getting at. . . . Just...very aggressive--the kind of person that always thinks that you're the smartest, or at least one of the smartest persons in the room.

Sometimes you have to be willing to lead; sometimes you have to be willing to follow....and when it *is* time to lead, he has to be *able* to lead. Now if everybody on his floor, you know, sees this goof get out of his car, you know, fighting with his coat as he's coming through the doors...if he brings forward this image of being a complete klutz and incompetent and losin' stuff...Uh, he has to be able to have an image...a persona that people are willing to follow, [that] people believe...will lead to the right place. Um...he has to have knowledge of what he's doing, the job he has, and has to be willing--you know, by personable, I mean that, uh, you know, the person sitting [at] the front door as he's coming in, he says 'Hi' to every morning. And that, uh--This person [sitting at] the front door knocks on this office one day, completely unglued. "Oh, yeah, what's the problem?" Turns out that so-and-so has been blowin' off calls from another company because he was waitin' for another account to come through, and he's kind of hedging on something, and the secretary's turning down phone calls left, right, and sideways. I have to be willing to get hold of that problem. And if I'm not personable, nobody out there is gonna tell me that this problem's existing. And I'm gonna think everything's wonderful and, okay, so it could be an extra three weeks for this particular account to come through for *this* company, but *this* company over here's been cuttin' their throat trying to get this account, you know, just because, well, he's been going to lunch with that guy, or, you know, that's his brother-in-law over there or something, you know. So there has to be knowledge of effects, you know, of the job. There has to be competence and personableness.

Below the surface, however, each area of endeavor was also seen to demand a kind of moral vocation.

[A good lawyer is] someone who's dedicated, who can, uh--who can put biases aside and do the job....Other than the basic needs, you know, need[ing] to be articulate or anything like that, uh/I'd like to say trustworthy...I think dedication is the main thing....In the criminal justice system, you have to be dedicated to that person, you know, I mean--and to the system, that the system's right, whether you like it or not, you know, that's the system, those are the rules you have to apply.

[Being a good doctor] takes good character--like, when you're real tired, treatin' people nice, being concerned about other people, pushin' through when you have to push through, doin' the hard work.

As a perfect lawyer, they don't have much of a life, because their life *is* the law. . . [They] will go the distance, I guess. It's the, uh, the person, the last mile, sprints, because that's all they have left, they don't have anything left to do but just to keep going. . . . To be honest, they're workaholics. (a prospective FBI agent whose police-officer grandfather had worked with Eliot Ness in the 1930's)

This equation of professional/managerial merit with commitment of character seemed very much of a piece with the belief that superior effort, "drive," initiative--what social psychologists call "achievement

motivation," in other words--*ought to be* and, on the whole, *would be* rewarded. This was front and center in the subjects' explanations for why some white adults were more successful than others.

> The successful people are very hard-working, very determined, very goal-oriented,...whereas the people that weren't successful were always looking to be given things. . . complaining about how hard they have it and how rough it is, instead of accepting it and just, you know, looking past it. . . .I think that it's 98% attitude.
>
> I don't think that, uh, that [the more successful people] had any kind--that there was any kind of difference in--in their socioeconomic standing, or whatever....I think everybody--the majority of Americans, anyway, are pretty much almost all on the same intelligence level, I mean, there's only a little bit that separates everybody. So it's gotta come from somewhere else. I think it comes from desire.)
>
> Motivation....I can't think of any other reason [to explain success and failure]. Because I'm thinking of examples in my head that...the one who makes it is just as smart as the one who doesn't make it; same background, but just have different motivation.
>
> I'm sure everyone would like to be a successful professional, earn an above average living, or whatever, you know, but it's a question, I think, of following through....You know, I have a friend who, uh, used to say, I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a lawyer, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But he never *did* anything about it.....So I think it's more a question of wanting it and then going out and doing it and actually putting the effort into it.
>
> I guess the people that I think are real successful didn't expect anything automatically to come to them, they didn't feel they were owed anything, and they just--they risked [losing] everything to get something more, and they repeatedly did this. And the people who weren't as successful, kind of, like, well, "I expect this promotion to come," and it would never come, and then they'd get upset, they'd get bitter, I guess it would snowball from there. ...[Success follows from] kind of, like, the willingness to accept the risk and be responsible for yourself, and that's it.

On the whole, the men interviewed conveyed a coherent and fairly consistent picture of what "merit" consisted of. *Measuring* merit, however, was more problematic.

The problem of measurement

To a considerable degree, those aspects of character, personality, and even technical aptitude most essential to professional/managerial excellence were not the sorts of things grades and test scores could very well assess.

> There's people who are geniuses but they're socially, you know, like--some of my fellow physics students are that way, don't have a lot of sense of what's going on around them.
>
> I'd be real scrupulous to the person that had the real high [Medical College Admissions Test score]. I'd want to make sure that they had--that they were a *real* well-rounded individual, that that's not all they know, you know. If I brought up, "Who's Babe Ruth?" at this interview and

somebody that got [perfect] scores on their MCAT, they go, "Uh...," you know. If you're [just] locked in a room [studying], you're not gonna know very much about people, you know.

I think those [Graduate Management Admissions Test] scores just go right out the window when it comes to [people skills]. I don't think that's any fair measure of how, uh, how a person can really work....I know for a fact that most businesses nowadays, when they're stuck between an A student and...a C student...they're gonna take the one, you know--the C student may have incredible people skills and the A student may be very smart, but street-dumb, so to say.

It was for these reasons--as well as the expressed likelihood of some advantages to themselves--that all but three of those interviewed endorsed somewhat greater reliance on more qualitative criteria by admissions personnel.

Work experience. *Life* experience...like, what could this person add to a classroom, or what could we learn from this person, what can they add...? . . . Being able to work [at a Loop consulting firm] while I've been doing my undergrad, I've really noticed a difference in my performance in the classroom. . . . We had to write a proposal on a consulting project...[for] a very closely held company...and one of the students was doing a financial analysis of the company, and he's disclosed that the owner and the CEO had an increase in salary of 75%. And [the student] made a big deal about it in his financial analysis....I said [to my classmate], "This person knows he gave himself a 75% raise, he doesn't want--you know, he doesn't want everybody to know that. You don't have to tell 'em that. Just don't even touch it, let's concentrate on other areas. . . . You want to continue your business and your relationship with the client."...I don't think I would have said anything if I wouldn't have worked [for this company] for a year and a half.

For an MBA candidate, [athletic experience] would be a good thing to have....because you get a lot of skills. Say you become a manager or a district manager of your firm; it's teamwork...Or, say, someone that volunteers to do Upward Bound as a college student...That'll show administrative skills, ability to work with people. (a varsity athlete at UIC)

[You need to determine] their attitudes towards people and medicine and different activities that they've done, you know. Have they worked with someone who's sick? How do they react with people like that? . . . Something novel...would be ...sort of like a probationary period that you might have on a job, although it'd be very informal, but have your [stronger] applicants...come in and, say, for a week you're gonna follow this med student around and for a week you're gonna follow this resident around, and then have the resident or that med student come in and talk to [the Director of Admissions] or write up a little on-page report saying what they thought about this person. Um...How does this person react when you walk into the room, uh, while you were making the rounds, or whatever?... Does he ask intelligent questions?...Did this person seem empathic or, you know, were they just concerned about making money, um, because I think you can learn a lot about a person, even in a short time like that.

I would look at involvement at the last level [of schooling or employment] that you were in....the not-traditional or not-required things that you were involved in--political action activists, environmentalists, feminism, things like that. How well you were committed to a certain particular charity or a certain particular organization. How much time did you put into going above and beyond what was required? [an office-holder in UIC's student government]

Just a few men offered some rather tentative affirmations of cultural bias in graduate professional admissions tests, in the sense of item or construct bias, as described earlier.

[Cultural bias might tend to follow from] very big ethnic or cultural differences [between blacks and Latinos] and the person writing the exam. Even if it's a board that writes it...the majority of that board would be white.

Maybe your reading comprehension stuff or the way you say stories could be related to, you know, white suburban and whatever and--[they should] try to keep [the tests] more generic and more, you know, stuff that everybody can--I think I might agree with [allegations of test bias].

The biggest cultural bias that I've heard about is language. For instance, the language that I--might be used in a white household might be different than used in a black household...[although] that's also, I think, dependent on income and things like that.

I can't think of a way that [the test would be culturally biased], if the MCATS are consisting mainly of...questions about scientific specifics, but, you know, if they stray from that, then there's more room for cultural problems.

But by in large, such bias was felt to be unlikely, taking into account that both white and minority test-takers would already be junior or seniors in college or college graduates.

I think that would be very important [with respect to standardized testing of school children] because *then* the child is only pretty much subjected to, you could say, his own little world of family, whatever...[which] might be vastly different from the way a test is written...but I don't know if it would have as large an effect...[on] the [Law School Admissions Test] as it would earlier on in, you know, grade school....There's cultural differences, especially in language, between blacks and whites. But by the time someone's 22, 23, they're at least familiar with, you know, quote-unquote standard English.

You'd have some language things, but I think once he gets through a university, any grounds that somebody might have to scream about that would have disappeared.

On the whole, there was considerable resistance to the notion that grades and test scores provided a *less* accurate assessment of blacks' or Latinos than of whites. Even if cultural bias were to be proved, however, this need not justify marginal inequalities in the interpretation of admissions test scores.

You could always bring in a new panel of test writers, and have it adjusted to meet, you know, a more ethnically balanced criteria.

Even if they *were* unfair...Why would you lower the standards [for blacks and Latinos]? Why don't you change the test then? Take it from the root.

Several men, moreover, seemed to be more receptive to affirmative action admissions in the context of criteria adjustments across the board, so that a variety of qualitative criteria, and not *just* race, would complement traditional, quantitative measures. For several reasons, however, not one of those interviewed wished to abandon the use of standardized test scores and grade point averages altogether.

For one thing, these were considered more objective, more absolute, than other measures, and for this reason much less likely to be colored by politics, nepotism, or the idiosyncrasies of a given rater.

> I don't know why, but I just...I'm more comfortable with [quantitative measures]. I, you know, it's something absolute, something you can rank against.

> Really, the problem just goes down the line. Now the pressure's gonna be on what kind of people are gonna be on that board that decides [who is admitted]. We're saying, okay, now, do we have an even split up of the different groups in this board? Because really, then, it's becoming an opinion type of issues, and people are gonna say, "No, that was an all-white board, there's no way that's gonna be fair." And they'll argue that forever.

> With the GPA and the GMAT, you're getting a sure number that, you know, for, you know, hard cash, where those other areas, you know, you can make your own decisions and--there's areas where you can, you know, pick and choose or whatever.

Giving greater weight to qualitative criteria, moreover, might *not* benefit blacks and Latinos.

> Who's doing the interviewing? That didn't change, did it? . . . I mean, you know, there's, like, too many guilty liberals and too many racist conservatives, you know?

> You might find some black or Latino [pre-meds] that have done a lot of community volunteer work or something. You might find some that have had to work at McDonald's or something all their summer breaks, in order to keep their heads above water while they're in college, you know what I mean? So I feel like, there might be a built-in bias against--Like myself...I had a part-time job, but I volunteered at the hospital. And my parents--luckily my parents could support me at home, and take care of me. So in terms of strictly evaluating someone in that way, it, uh/.

And even if modifications in criteria did help balance the scales, the political backlash of such a change in policy might more than offset any benefits to diversity--one reason for maintaining fairly immutable minimum standards.

> [Favoring relatively subjective, qualitative criteria] gives too much room for someone to discriminate in. And not just that; it is more a--it creates more of a hostility inside...the graduate student community towards each other. But you were given this, I wasn't given this, and, you know, it's a total backbiting kind of thing....the resentment on every level is gonna be there. . . . It would be fantastic if *everybody* had *no* particular bias on themselves, and could *really* do this [kind of assessment fairly]. But you can't guarantee the professionalism of everybody that handles that. I don't think [admission] should be based as heavily as it is on grades. [But] you're gonna have to have some line in the sand that divides a--that sets a standard, that people can compare themselves to. Otherwise there's no justification for somebody not coming back in...[with] nepotism...and anything like that.

Taking everything into account, some men made it clear that any new mix of criteria ought to be applied within a rigorous quantitative framework.

> I'm the end-all-be-all [in the area of admissions], huh? . . .I would try and weight the ways that you go through. Like, your interview is so many percentage of it. Your written essay is so much. Your work experience. Your grades. Your GPA...Your LSAT. . . I would break things down into fixed percentages. . . . It would be the most obnoxious mathematical formula that I could understand.

Prospective applicants, moreover, deserved to know the score ahead of time.

> The change would be appropriate if the change is being made ...in an acceptable way....announced with enough advance time for those students who are thinking...of attending that school to say, that is not anymore what *I* see as what I want, how I want to prepare myself...I will choose a different school. Or, this *is* a better choice than the other choices that are available, and now I will concentrate on those things that are required to get admitted.

On the whole, then, changes in criteria were a risky proposition. At the same time, more traditional measures were considered highly relevant to *some* aspects of professional/managerial merit; and exceptionally *poor* performance was especially ominous.

> I think you can do real well on a test and still be a bad doctor...[although] you can't do real bad on a test and still be a *wonderful* doctor.
>
> [The LSAT is] a fairly good indictor of how well, you know, they can reason and things like that.
>
> I'm going to assume that in general . . . if you get a 4.5 [GPA], your knowledge--you know, book knowledge, that is--is a bit higher, cause you learn that much percentage more in each class, and a person who receives 4.2 has learned that much less.
>
> You know, if someone came into med school and said, "Oh, I have all Cs in all my science courses," I might sort of look at them and say, "Well, you get it, but you don't get it enough to be a doctor and have people put their trust in you."

Moreover, grades and test scores could indeed tell us a something about character and stick-to-it-iveness.

> The nicest thing about the standardized test has to offer, is the fact the people are willing to come up and study for and take it. And by that, it gives you an idea of their commitment towards [getting an MBA].
>
> What good grades show to me, if I was an admissions officer...is that the guy knows how to carry through on a commitment. You start a class, you end a class, you get a good grade, they're responsible, they're disciplined, that kind of thing.

Course grades might say something about people skills as well as motivation and self-discipline.

> Some professors might be very demanding, but at the same time very explicit in their requirements. Whereas others, they've been good professors, but, you know, just--they're difficult to deal with, they're hard to talk to, um, their tests are impossible....you have to kind of adapt yourself to their methods so you can end up gettin' the better grade....It's an experience you went through, I mean, you deal with it, and you got through it."

That was the principal difficulty with an admissions lottery: No advantage would be given to the applicant with "that self-hunger for medicine." With respect to business school as well, "the guy who's really dyin' and bleedin' in his soul for the thing can't have it." And it was *these* applicants who were more likely to do a better job down the line.

> What would happen if Albert Einstein was denied a college education just because his number didn't come up?...What would we have lost if Thomas Edison never went to college [because], you know, his name wasn't up, too? I mean, if working hard is not a criterion for how much someone is going to achieve, you begin to have a Soviet economic type system which simply is, who knows who, and that's it.
>
> [Some applicants] who have maybe worked hard their entire life to get into medical school/pulled good grades, worked, everything included, and just by the luck of the draw, they don't get in...and some guy who, you know, just, well, drank all the way through college and partied, you know, and just squeezed on by, and he gets into medical school, that would be very unfair by--You're not taking into account *who* really worked hard and who would really be good...the people who worked hard should actually, you know, get the benefits, and the people who sit back, you know...You know, you get what you worked for, you get out what you put in--You *hope* you get out what you put in, I guess, you know. . . . I think if you look at the majority and the average, people who work hard during medical school and during high school and college will do--will work hard when they're *out* of that, you know, it's their work ethic, their work habits.
>
> People who worked harder won't get in. People who worked harder are the people who are good doctors.

Loosen standards too far, moreover, and graduate professional schools might waste scarce educational resources on those without sufficient interest to profit from them.

> What kind of motivation do [applicants] have?...What's their potential in the future?...What is their potential to see this through? In other words, I'm taking a risk by putting you in my college....Are you a good risk for me to take?

Absolute quotas prompted similar concerns to lotteries: With the complete abandonment of minimum standards, law schools might not screen out some applicants who

> weren't very serious academically, who...weren't really striving to get [into law school]...[and] might not make the best of the opportunity. I think that affirmative action is necessary but it should be minimums. . . . I just think that if you're going into law school, you have a goal and you--I don't know, we're talking about people that are probably 22, 23 years old. And they

> should be trying to get good grades in their undergraduate work. And if they haven't, then...regardless of their color...going to law school wasn't really a priority to them.

Two men offered these sorts of argument to justify their own falls from grace. One pre-med had started college as an applied music major at a distinguished university music school out of state, before dropping out and eventually enrolling at UIC. He was not very forthcoming about what had prompted this change of direction; but in his discussion of success and failure, he explained that the reason his fellow-students "survived organ school and I didn't [was that] I wasn't willing to pay the price." Another man had accumulated a rather unpromising grade point average, as pre-meds go, despite his obvious quickness of mind and several years as a laboratory assistant to a medical researcher who had mentored him since high school. When I inquired, the subject explained that the pre-med curriculum demanded a good deal of rote learning, which he had never been very good at. But he had no complaints about this sort of educational regimen:

> Evidently I didn't have the drive enough, or else my grades would have been better. I was brought up--I was taught that I could do anything I want, if I want it bad enough. You know, that's idealistic, whatever, but I believe its true...and if I don't get it's, it 'cause I didn't want it bad enough.

Another prospective medical student--a thirty-five-year-old pre-nursing sophomore who had been a casualty of the late '60's-early '70's drug culture--made the same kind of link between grades and merit.

> In the days when I couldn't possibly get it together to even enroll, those were days when my interpersonal skills were also poor, I was not as able to communicate, and I was not able to help myself out of a bad situation...you couldn't count on me to get somewhere at a certain time.....Like, in those day, I might have been nice about doing something for someone, but I might not have been good at it, because I wouldn't have had the alacrity to go in and *do it* for them....And those things tie together....Your ability to get a good grade in class will indicate whether you're simply able to do something.

Environmental press

The salience of effort and commitment to professional or academic success bore a paradoxical relationship to attitudes toward affirmative action. On one hand, it supported the notion of autonomous achievement without "special breaks." At the same time, there was a general recognition--albeit a reluctant one, in some cases--that the relationship between achievement motivation and actual, demonstrable achievement was largely mediated by a variety of environmental or structural factors, most especially family background and economics.

Just coming from my own experience, I know that, um, if you push hard enough, you can get stuff done....But then again, you have to have that in your mind*set*, that you can do it. I mean, if you're not accustomed to that way of thinking, you're not going to think that way. I mean, I know people who have, you know, the first thing goes wrong and they go, "Hell, it's not gonna work," you know. . . . I think to a certain age...the environment that you're set in will *form* the way that you think.

Somebody who's gifted in a particular area generally will ...have a tendency to...stand out....But...I mean, you might have somebody who's, you know, a gifted writer...[who's] gotta...work two jobs or something like that to support their family. . . . People I know that are...unsuccessful are generally lazy people [who] don't want to get any more out of life than to eat, sleep, and, you know...simple pleasures...I'd have to say, part of it, it's somewhat inherent. But...a lot of those people who are lazy probably have--deep down inside, they have a drive within them to *be* successful, but because of the way...they...were brought up, or the environment they lived in...*they became* satisfied.

It may take longer, but I think that [regardless of their background] someone who has the strong inner drive can still succeed. It's a little bit harder, but--I'm not saying that it's ideal, and if they do go for it, they're going to eventually make it, because, I mean, sometimes they just don't....[But] there *are* ways to get around things for most people....Inner drive has a lot more to do with it than economics. Though, as I said, there are extremes where economics just--not matter how a person tries, that's just not, you know.

Recognition of this dynamic helped to support endorsements for reweighted admissions criteria--whether or not the subject felt that race should be one of them.

There may be a reason that my gradepoint's lower than Joe Schmoe over here, because I work 40 hours a week when I've I'm in school, I have three kids, you know, and who knows what. And actually that type of person may be more desirable for med school because they're more mature, they've seen more, you know? I mean they're more likely to succeed. They're more motivated. ...And if [such criteria] happen to bring in more minorities, then that's great.(Tony)

I think that then you'd have a much stronger picture. Maybe, you know, the guy who's a couple steps behind me and stuff, maybe he dropped out of school to go to work because his sister had kids or something. . . When somebody comes in that door, I can ask him, "How'd you *get* three raises in 18 months? How come your grades were so low?" "Well, I was working midnights." That explains everything. I've worked midnights. "Well, what were your expenses like at the time?" I'm gonna spend time talking to you, before I turn him away. "Are you gonna work midnights when you're here?"' "No, I left that job long since." Good, you know. And if he's able to show extreme progress in work *after* leaving there, you know, he stands a good chance.

[Qualitative criteria] shouldn't gauge a whole lot...[but] there should be something. I mean, if a person coming out of high school had lower grades, and yet that person had to work all the way through high school, it--there should be some--some exception made, a slight exception made. . . . a couple of extra points on a scale of, you know, because of what a person has had to do while in school.

Economics might of course constrain the academic achievement of whites as well as minorities. One man who had been self-supporting since midway through high school had learned a trade at a community college before coming to UIC.

[My grades have been] progressively better throughout the years except for when I've had to work a lot....One time particularly I can remember that I was gonna get an A in a course, and because I work on computers, computers go down, and my clients tend to be lawyers and stuff. This lawyer had a case on their hard drive, like, this thick, you know...a couple of hundred pages. And, um, they needed it printed out, but...the hard drive went down, and the case was gonna be like in a week, and I spent many hours doing it. My grades went dropping from A to a C. And so that's something medical schools, when they look at my grades aren't gonna see.

Looking at the other end of the spectrum, two men explained the competitive advantages of pre-meds from Ivy League and comparable schools in terms of what money could buy those schools and their largely upper-middle class student bodies.

Most of these prestigious schools have higher standards within the schools, so the students actually work harder. But...also...[in] some of the prestigious schools--especially the smaller ones...[it is] because the student gets more attention. Each student has more contact with the teacher. Classes are smaller....If all students had that, then all students would do better.

Better education. Better support networks--You know, do you have a car to get from home to college . . . Better facilities--you know, they have new microscopes and they have, uh, you know, at MIT, you have a Nobel Prize-winning physicist that you can pay $100,000 a year to, as opposed to UIC, where you probably don't have that sort of--I could be wrong, but that's my impression....You call home and say, "Send me a hundred bucks, I need to buy some socks," or something. . . . You know, you're not worried about certain things and you can focus your energy and attention towards getting the job done.

Merit, in other words, was cumulative, and to a very considerable extent a sociocultural product. And among inner-city minority youth especially, the concentration of economically marginalized families brought with it additional, structural barriers to the blossoming of one's potential. On one hand, a majority of those interviewed traced unequal academic outcomes in large part to inferior, under-funded public grade schools and high schools, which left a good many blacks and Latinos seriously handicapped once in college.

What [affirmative action admissions is] doing, then, is saying, "'Okay, you have to be better than the next guy, but in certain ways you can't compete with the next guy." I went to a Catholic school. I may have gotten a better education than someone in a Chicago public high school. I took all my sciences. I took for years of English, and then I went to college, and I've had no real problems, and I've worked hard. But other people who don't have those tools may not be able to compete this way.

College is actually the easy part [of one's education], 'cause you got all the basic skills in [grade school and high school]. Then [in college] you really start to explore things and look at things. But if you're struggling with your basic algebra, how can you understand the basic math concepts of economics? If you're really working hard to put a sentence together, how can you understand literature--what it means, you know? So all those things; if you're reading at a 5th-grade level, how can you do your assignments at night? . . . When I was in...my last economics class, I had a girl was in two of my classes, and we used to sit together, and she'd just never get it. We used to sit and have counseling sessions after every class, we sat for an hour, and I found that the most--the things that she was deficient on were things that *I* knew in

high school, and that if you didn't know those...simple, basic things, the rest of the course just didn't come into focus. And the professor had no time to take this one person and do [what Larry was doing]. I feel that once you start behind and you're in college, there's no way you can catch up. There's no way you can...learn the basics of the course *and* at the same time review what you should have known in the first place.

The disadvantages conferred by inferior public schooling were compounded, however, by an inner-city "culture of poverty"--pervasive unemployment, substance abuse, gang violence, teenage mothers, absent fathers, material decay and negative peer pressure--that impinged further on school achievement.

If you were to grow up in a set of projects where everything around you is just--you see all these people, and none of them are striving for anything. Some of them are, but, you know, the overwhelming majority are just on welfare or--Where in your mind do you see the goals to strive? You don't see role models, you don't see people trying to tell you to strive, you don't have people pushing you. And, I mean, you're, like, set by the standards of living in those projects. You might want the out, but you have no way of knowing how to.

I'm from Joliet [Illinois], and they have a terrible gang problem....And I've known many [gang members]. I've known many of the black kids. And they were great kids but then they--did okay in school, but they never--they weren't interested in going to college. That's a thing they didn't do. Their parents hadn't gone; their brothers didn't go, and they just--they weren't gonna do that--anything. But then--well, I had, like, I was really close to them when we were, like, 14. By the time I saw them again, when we were 17, you know, they would--where they lived, it just caught up to them, and they were into drugs and guns . . . They were nice to me. They were great. But, you know, they wouldn't pursue an education. . . One particular [black] friend that I had, he *did* go away to college, he went to Robert Morris College here [in Chicago], and he made good....But then he got shot and now he's blind. And so you can't get away from it.

On one hand, a good deal of one's "motivation" might very well be diverted to immediate survival needs.

It's harder for them to learn because they're having to live on--you know, survive down here...as opposed to where I didn't have to worry about where my next meal was gonna come from or if I was gonna get a bullet through my window at night or...what have you, and those things could weigh heavy on you.

Like I said, good students will succeed anywhere. But if you're in a school that's, like, you know, you have to constantly, like, worry about getting shot, I mean, you know, a lot of [young men]...that are constantly worried about their own personal safety will join a gang just [so]...if somebody messes with them, they'd have somebody watching their back and, you know, all of that type of stuff. . . . If you have constant, uh, outside factors affecting the educational process, you know, those students aren't going to be able to learn, or at least, you know, achieve their...capabilities, or, you know, what they possibly could have, if they were somewhere else.

Obviously, when you go to school, and your parents can afford the Presidential Towers [condominiums], you don't have to worry about crime and you have a new car you can drive over here, it's a lot easier to do better in school than if you have to take a bus an hour and a half and you're driving through a bad part of town, and once you get off the bus [on your way

home], you have to watch over your shoulders that no one's shooting, you know, and people bothering you with alcohol and drugs; these are all social obstacles that more minorities have to go through just by the mere *area*....They're out there trying to survive, you know? They're not out there trying to get a decent job like me, they're out there trying to survive. Make it into the next day. So they're not shot, so they're not mugged, take care of their mom or their brother, you know?

On the other hand, the same sociocultural milieu might undercut both the affective and cognitive underpinnings of achievement motivation itself.

[Many blacks and Latinos] come from backgrounds that don't really teach them about how to channel their energy toward more productive efforts. . . . they don't know what their potential is...[or] how to put their best efforts forth.

If a black is as motivated as a fairly *un*motivated white, where a white would get through college with, maybe, C's, and, like, go into the work world, and maybe his parents paid the tuition, something like that. And you get a black who's just as motivated as that, and I don't think he's gonna go anywhere. Because...not only does he have to *want* to get into college, he's gonna have to want it so hard that he's not gonna go off with his friends. . . . The peer pressure is not to get A's in school; it's to be tough, to make it through the next day, it's too get some money, you know, it's to buy a nice set of shoes...or to buy that leather, uh, I don't know, Bulls jacket or something.

Sometimes I don't understand where [black-on-black violence comes] from: They're in a bad position and...they make it worse....I think the violence is part of the--part of the position they're in. They don't have much, so if they see something that they want, what have they go to lose, really? to go to jail and watch cable TV, you know....But, uh...I don't know--I don't think they *know* the difference between what's bad or what's right and what's wrong. Drive down Roosevelt Road here... and [it makes one] wonder what makes people do what they're doin', you know, five o'clock in the afternoon, drinkin' a bottle of malt liquor. I don't know. I often think to myself, if I was in that position, what would I do? I'd wanna get the heck out of there. But then again, like I said, they might not *know* any other way. To them it's all concrete and buildings, projects.

The economic marginalization of the people around them could easily engender defeatist decision strategies in minority youth, somewhere between "sour grapes" and "minimizing the maximum loss."

I think, general, the attitude may be...that...the situation I'm in *now*, I'm placed in an inferior position. So I can try as hard as I can, but it may not make a difference. Or else I can just go with the flow, and just accept the position I'm in, and not bust my ass. I may bust my ass and be here in twenty years, the same place.

What their neighbors and their parents are telling [many black and Latino youth] is that, well, you can't do anything, [you're] just going to end up being like me. And he tends to say, well...I don't want to achieve anything, 'cause I'm not going to, therefore I won't desire it, you know. It's not that they...don't have the desire, but they're told not to desire it.

To a very considerable extent, the deleterious consequences of poverty were seen to be mediated by dysfunctional or simply over-burdened inner-city families.

> Maybe the problem with the blacks is that they're seeing, you know, my dad didn't work, why should I work? And my mother didn't work, why should I work? You know, if they're pickin' up a free meal ticket.
>
> It just seems to be the case, as it is right now, where the blacks' and Latinos' children may be less supervised or less--it just seems where their parents--not that they *care* less, but they've almost given up on everything. Where, you know, the one's that haven't given up, you can see...that the results are considerably better for their children. And their children get better grades...they stay out of trouble, they don't get killed by age 15.

References to the critical role of fathers included several personal testimonials to the affective and moral bonds between fathers and sons.

> It's ingrained in your mind at a very, very early age, that [dedication and hard work are] what it takes to achieve....[My cousin] Tony got that from his father...I was there one Christmas Eve, and Tony had to go to work [at the local factory], so, he goes, "I'm gonna call in sick." And [his father] says, "Don't. You get a reputation as someone who calls in....You go to work...you grunt it out, and later you'll achieve." Well, next year, he came back in as a foreman. Because he came in, he did that. But he *got* that...It goes back to that role model....I think that's where blacks and Latinos really lose out...if the father and mother are...poor, [or] if they're not there.
>
> When you see the percentage of how many homes that are single mothers, which maybe isn't all that bad, but I know I looked up to my father, and I still do. He was a very important part of my life, and I take a lot of what I am from him. And I could not see growing up without the figurehead. . . . You need more than just a presence....It's one thing to have a father who comes home and puts down his six-pack and then knocks you on you butt. . . . [What is needed is] someone who you see coming home every day, working hard. Someone who says, "Wow, you did a really good job with that," every once in a while. Not somebody who candies you, [but] who tells you the truth. Who says, "Hey, you have to start doing better. You gotta straighten up you act." And maybe every once in a while will slap you around, if that's what *you* need. Someone to help you, I guess.

Just as family problems were seen to mediate the effects of poverty, so poverty was seen to mediate the effects of racism on the flowering of academic merit.

> [Economics] determines what you put priority on and what you have *time* to put priority on. It determines what you value....I think some of the differences--cultural, as well as, like, performance economically between their races have to do with economics rather than race itself.

Largely for this reason, advocates of affirmative action admissions or other proactive remedies for inequality often expressed some concern that these remedies target *low income* blacks and Latinos in particular.

> Now, when I'm talking about blacks, more or less, I'm talking about the poorer areas....I mean, I'm not referring to the higher class, because those people have *seen* achievement. They know what it looks like. And they're being pushed, you know. I mean, I think that's probably the major thing, is being pushed...not wanting to--not wanting it as much [yourself], but pushing you to the point of where you do want it....Because [achievement is] not a reality [for

many inner-city blacks], they must dismiss it from their mind. . . . It's not race, it's class. I think there's poor white areas, and I think they're in the same situation as poor black areas.

Before I say *which* [affirmative action admissions] policy I would prefer, there is a *problem* I see with racial set-asides....It's intended--I believe it's intended to help less--you know, those people who might not otherwise have those opportunities, those who are less fortunate, or whatever. *But* I wonder to what extent those racial set-asides go not to...the person who worked to get themselves out of the ghetto or a housing project or whatever, and actually go to college, and was going on [to graduate school], but instead to suburban blacks or suburban Latinos--I mean, to whatever extent there *are* suburban Latinos--you know, and those who have gone to, um, suburban [high] schools and have achieved roughly the same as the whites who have gone to suburban schools. I wonder to what extent they're going to *those* sorts of people--those sorts of racial minorities--instead of...those in the cities? . . . A black or a Latino who grew up in the same community as I did and went to the same school and, I mean, and had a nuclear family, and had all the advantages that I did, ought *not* to have the advantages that *should* be allocated to someone who is *dis*advantaged.

Affirmative action, in other words, was not strictly speaking a remedy for racism per se, which may of course impact minorities of any socioeconomic background, but a remedy for the indirect effects of racism on academic achievement, as these were mediated by poverty, and by the effects of poverty in turn on family life and public-school quality. On the other hand, there was substantial praise for Jewish- and Asian-Americans, who were seen to have achieved *over*-representation in the upper strata of the American work force notwithstanding substantial discrimination against them, by dint of cultural traditions supporting academic pursuits, achievement motivation, and family solidarity.

This helped to explain why none of those interviewed was willing to place a ceiling on graduate professional school admissions awarded to members of these groups. On the contrary, some suggested than these groups might serve as role models for the rest of us, not withstanding a few qualms about the burdens they sometimes placed on their offspring.

If [Jewish or Asian medical school applicants] spent, you know, 90% of their childhood life and adolescent life...studying, and they worked that hard, they should be able to get in, you know? And if you're gonna have blacks that are gonna spend that much time, good, more power to you, you can get in, you know, and there should be no limit.

They're--from the people I know, they're pressed more. You know...they're, like, real--it's a high stress, living in those families, from what I know. . . . the Asians...are real strict and [academic success is] the number one priority. And that, you know, that's drive. That's, you know, they're doin' what it takes to be--So I don't see any problem with that. They've got, you know, they've got more of it than the average white person, so/

You have a member of the population that is achieving above and beyond another group, then you don't take *away* from that group. You look at what they're doing. I think if you look at either [Jewish- or Asian-Americans], you'll see parental influence on their futures. You'll see Asian-Americans very, very adamant about their children doing very well in school. You don't

take away from that. You simply tell the rest of the population, if you want to achieve the same way--Society only gets better as it's forced to change.

The strength of one's honor in an oriental culture definitely is higher than anywhere in the United States, any other group in the United States. And the values that are being held that high are values that seem to be, uh, support their progress, whether they're economically or academically or whatever their endeavor is. And to *not* discriminate [in their favor] and to not say that, "Yes, that *is* a better value system than not caring *anything* about positive values," could be to be a hypocrite. It would be to say, "Well, you know, who's to say your values are better than mine? Mine are just as good as yours. But, you know, give me half of what you make, because you make more money than I."

For similar reasons, a few men expressed concern that affirmative action might compensate too far for the consequences of inadequate parenting.

That's your *personal* family. I've seen black families--I have seen friends that happened to be black, and their grades are, like, far and above my own. I mean, you know, this one guy...I didn't know him too well, but he always ranked in the top four people in my [high school] class. He was black. He was in a bad neighborhood. But the point was, he *wanted* to do the good grades, his parents wanted him to do it. You know, they're just using, well, "I was black, it's not fair," that's just an excuse for not wanting to try hard enough. . . . [Conversely] you can't punish [a white student] for having a good home life. . . . If [blacks and Latinos are] going to blame anybody...don't blame us [whites], blame your parents. They were the one's that didn't care enough about you. Or maybe not that they didn't care enough, but, didn't put forth the effort, you know...It's like you're taxing white students because of the fact that their parents tried harder.

Maybe the reason I did better was that my parents would beat me when I walked in with bad grades....They didn't beat the hell out of me, but, you know, I was *in trouble*. . . . So my parents took more of an active, and--My parents were doing things to make *my* life better, and increase where I was gonna be in life, and what the quality of *my* life would be. They spent that time, I spent that time, and I think that, uh, in this situation, I think I'm gonna wind up with somebody *in* class next to me, who's not prepared to compete with me.

I mean, there's real validity in saying, "We're going to allow you in here and let you have a chance."...On the other hand, though, there's, um...it seems like the rewards of clean living are being diffused. . . . Why should a nuclear family work to stay together, when, you know, any social benefits or whatever are only going to be compensated for later if they were not together?

On the other hand, a desire to help inner-city children rise above the psychosocial and sociocultural constraints of their own communities was a powerful argument for graduate professional schools' outreach to inner-city public schools. Advocates no less than opponents seemed to view affirmative action admissions graduate professional schools as a worst-case -scenario.

[Inner-city blacks and Latinos] all carry baggage with them. The point might be, how do you address that? And I think you have to look at...what causes them to get behind....And again, we go back to the grade school and high school affecting them at that level, giving them the confidence and the role models, and that would eliminate all of the rest of it....You wouldn't need [affirmative action at the college level]--you wouldn't have the definite lack of

> representation that currently exists--if it wasn't for lack of opportunity....You equate opportunity, and then you try to do as much as you can to alleviate the baggage they bring, then you can start equating those [standardized admissions test] scores. But until you do, you're gonna have to have some kind of set-aside that helps that out. Unfortunately.

All but four subjects endorsed race-targeted supply-side remedies, targeting school-children if not undergraduates, that could pave the way for autonomous achievement.

> It's not, like, well, we're coming down for you; it's like, well, we're bringing you up for us./And that way it's gonna make for a better--you know, more competition is better for everyone concerned.

> You're *enticing* students to work at something and to really make a decision for themselves...to come here. . . . Just saying, "Hey, come and come to us," that is not recruiting. When you say, 'This is what you need to do to [qualify]: You need to take math, sciences, and a foreign language. . . . I like that better than...I guess this sounds like a typical white male kind of thing to say, but [better than] a 'free meal' for someone. [University outreach personnel might instill] a greater desire for--a work ethic, that [the children] might not have had [otherwise] . . . And the payoff benefit of doing that early, let's say in the sophomore year [of high school, is that] they start earlier with the work ethic...so they...elevate *themselves* to a higher platform. So that *they* are doing the work because of a thought process that you've put in their heads.

> If things were started off earlier, maybe then we might see it in twenty, thirty years that the notion of set-asides--they'd be no reason. I mean, set-asides seem to be set up to take care of past injustices. Well, hopefully there'll be a point where they're no longer past injustices that need to be taken care of, so you eliminate it.

"If things started off earlier," in other words, diversity would not *require* marginal preferences for college graduates of color; rather, proportionate numbers of blacks and Latinos could make a place for themselves strictly "on their merits."

Bones of contention

Regarding the legitimacy of meritocratic allocation and the virtues of individual autonomy, the vote was unanimous. Affirmative action admissions advocates were more likely to express concern regarding *excessive* disparities in wealth and income; but the principle of merit-based differentials remained unchallenged.

> I accept the inequalities, but I think that there's a certain--there's a level of inequality that shouldn't be accepted by anybody. . . there's a level of living that I believe everybody should be above...beyond that, I think, you know/that's life. . . . I have no problem with people being too rich...that's the way life is. . . . I believe that once everybody has risen above a certain level of living--a level where everybody should be allowed to live, and have the necessities of life, be able to live comfortably and be happy--above that, it's a matter of getting it on your own.

Translating principle into practice, however, somewhat different constructions of diversity and

collective utility, self-reliance and collective accountability, seemed to yield different policy preferences.

Of special interest were some marked differences in viewpoint regarding the benefits of more proportionate representation of blacks and Latinos among the nations physicians, lawyers, and upper-tier business executives. Several men on both sides of the fence felt that greater professional/managerial diversity would very likely benefit business, the professions, or society at large, helping to generate or promulgate new products or new ideas, and helping to manage and sell to an increasingly diverse market and work force. But those more resistant to affirmative action were much less likely to affirm any particular benefits of professional/managerial diversity to their own ethnic communities.

> I think when you're in America, everything's kind of standardized, you know? You come and do your job and you do what they taught you in medical school, and I think everybody gets--you know, it doesn't matter what your culture is.

TABLE 2: Selected Points of Contention between Advocates and Opponents

	Affirmative Action Proponents	Opponents
Greater professional/managerial diversity better for white-majority institutions/firms/society at large [a]	12	9
More professional/managerial diversity would help provide blacks/Latinos better/more simpatico goods/services [a]	15	6
Some admissions test items likely to be biased against blacks/Latinos [a]	5	1
Predictive bias in scores/grades likely	14	6
Racism has contributed significantly to academic outcomes differentials between races [a]	14	6
Blacks/Latinos over-state/over-react to racism	4	10
Differentials in public elementary and high school quality partly to blame for unequal outcomes between races	16	8

[a] Include responses to specific either-or/yes-or-no questions in protocol, as well as instances when the issue was first raised by the subject.

It's true that the patients and doctors might respond better to each other, and I think there's jerks out there who have problems with--between races, but...I don't think it has to be that way. Besides, I mean, I don't think they have to get worse care. I think they should just--I can treat a black person just as well as a white person....Yeah, the job is, the patient's sick, you want to get them better. Whether it *feels* nice is not a real big question for me.

I've had encounters where [white] friends have told me they've gone to a white lawyer, and the white lawyer's treated them absolutely horribly. That's just the individual person, you can't classify that by race.

By contrast, those more amenable to affirmative action were also more likely to affirm such in-group benefits, taking into account the subjective needs as well as the objective requirements of patients, clients, and clientele.

Black people deal with things in a different way than white people do. That's not a racial statement, that's just a fact, that's something they just do.

[In the criminal justice system] you need people who are going to be able to deal with *people*.... You're out there. And blacks, Hispanics, and whites all deal with law....And you're all gonna have to deal with it in your own ways. . . . Who's gonna want what kind of lawyer?...I don't speak Spanish and I'm a lawyer, yet I have to defend the Latino who I have to talk to through an interpreter....The black guy may not want me, 'cause he thinks, I'm a white guy, "Oh, he doesn't know what he's talkin' about, he's just gonna set me up, he's gonna write me off, and not give a care.

I think it's very subtle. In terms of better care, it may be marginal, but it may be, you know, that--who's to say that's a marginal difference for the patient? . . . I don't think there would be a vast difference, but there could be a difference.

Maybe a [black or Latino] client wouldn't be defended as well if his attorney can't empathize with his situation. . . . Also, if there were more black and Latino lawyers, there would eventually be more black and Latino judges and, um, blacks and Latinos throughout the whole legal system, and that would really help us with judging, and with the rehabilitation kind of thing. . . . I think if they are going to be prosecuted by our legal system, they should have a hand in shaping it.

Without more minority professionals, moreover, blacks and Latinos might be denied access to critical services altogether.

My basic reason [for endorsing affirmative action admissions] is this: It's because, um, white--I believe white doctors will go to white neighborhoods to practice, and I believe black rich doctors will return to their black richer neighborhoods, 'cause they're from *there*. So--and then the areas that *need* doctors are the poor Latino areas and poor black areas....So we need to pick people from those areas because they will most likely be able to go back into their neighborhoods and practice medicine there, 'cause that's where they come from. And that's my *main* reason for feeling that there should be *some* type of affirmative action.

All things considered, then, the racial identity of a professional or manager was itself a kind of merit.

From this perspective, utilitarian arguments for distributive equity actually supported affirmative action admissions, seriously undercutting principled objections to it. Perhaps it not simply the luck of the draw in a small sample that this difference in perspective was even more pronounced among those with the most extreme policy preferences. Comparing what might reasonably be categorized as the strongest advocates of affirmative action admissions--that is, those ten subjects willing to accept absolute quotas, or race-normed rather than race-neutral criterion cut-offs, on behalf black and Latino to graduate professional schools generally--with seven men who opposed both affirmative action admissions and race-targeted pump-priming among undergraduates, we find that *all of the former* and *none of the latter* recognized in-group benefits of professional/managerial diversity.

Advocates in general were also somewhat more likely than opponents to posit item or construct bias against blacks and Latinos in standardized tests. Of more significance, however, advocates were more likely to cite or affirm *predictive* bias, because blacks and Latinos had not had a fair chance to develop their talents. It was not just a question of socioeconomic status--which after all varied within every racial group, and therefore could not validate marginal preferences on the basis of race--but the extent to which poverty, the culture poverty, and institutional racism on the part of public elementary and secondary school were thought to mediate the cumulative effects of broad-scale racism on academic achievement.

Opponents of affirmative action never questioned the history of bigotry and discrimination against blacks and Latinos in this country, or the persistence of racism in the present day. But they were more likely to downplay the latter; somewhat more likely to equate past discrimination against blacks, Latinos, and white ethnics; and more likely to downplay the long-term consequences of historic racism for contemporary Americans of colors.

> It hasn't been that long since we got rid of segregation, you know. . . . [Before the 1960's) blacks weren't treated equally....they didn't have the opportunity to go to school....They were subjected to, you know, they were trying--they weren't giving them equal opportunity, okay?...Okay, that's not right. And so you have a generation of blacks who weren't given that opportunity, okay, and then they grow up and they have kids, and their children are higher up, but not, still, quite there yet, you know? But now, I think that the black people my age, I think that it's--we're even. I think we're fair, you know?

A finance major nonetheless offered some questionable arithmetic.

> In the past--I think [of racism as] probably affecting people who are in their 40's, who are a little older now. But I don't think it's really an excuse anymore, because even if there are white people in high positions who do possess prejudices, I don't think that they're allowed to act on them any more. I just don't think it would be possible in this day and age, it's sort of taboo.

Looking for alternative explanations for differential outcomes, two opponents suggested fundamental, long-standing cultural differences in achievement motivation.

> I just think it's as a result of those who were never taught to work hard, and it's just been passed down the line. . . . I guess you say that it is a cultural difference, because if you look at the countries that these minorities' ancestors are from, um/the lifestyles that their ancestors had, back in those countries, it's not at the same level as the white majority of people in this country. . . . That's where it originally comes from, and that's why they haven't been taught to work hard.

> Different cultures place different emphasis on career. Even if there was, you know, no economic differences or anything between blacks and whites, who's to say that black people would want to--as many black people as white people would want to be doctors?

By contrast, affirmative action admissions advocates tended to place less distance between historic and contemporary racism, and to characterize the psychosocial and sociocultural roots of inequality as the transgenerational consequences of slavery, bigotry, and economic discrimination.

> [Blacks and Latinos are] denied not only the opportunities of education; [minority adults have] been denied the opportunities of promotion...that's the reason why there's this [economic and academic] disparity. And you can go back all the way towards, uh, towards *preschool* for the education of it. And then you have to go back farther, because...the parents of the prospective graduate student, when they were *born*, were not equipped to be able to--as well as white parents were, to teach their children. So if you go back further, you know, you can go back several centuries, so that's the root of the problem.

> [Blacks] were basically stifled. I mean, I'm pretty sure I read they weren't allowed to read and write for about a hundred years. . . When a whole race doesn't read, write, or think for themselves for, you know, a couple--three generations, let's say, I would think that that would kind of reverse, uh, their progress towards knowledge or towards anything.

> If a [minority] parent grows up feeling *less* [than] another person, it's gonna be shown in a way that they bring up *their* kids. And I know the generation that is still alive that was--went through all the racial tensions with Martin Luther King, and all the segregation and stuff and--you know, so that feeling is still around. . . But I think from my generation and those below us --I, you know, it's still there, obviously. But it's a lot less than it used to be.

> After the Brown [vs. Board of Education] decision in '54 and '55...and the subsequent desegregation and school rights movement in the '60s, that a lot of ground was gained by minorities. But through the '70's and '80's--I think partly because of the Republican presidencies and the conservative Supreme Court--it was, like, they said, "Okay, you're equal, so now anything is fair game," as in, "We're not going to help you any more, because you're equal."...But they had never reached that equal. They just wanted a level playing field. But

that field was never leveled out, where they still had room to--they still hadn't achieved equality in social life. And that's still at the same [level of] social despair.

They're born with the slavery stigma, you know. Their ancestors were slaves. . . . I mean, I think to be a child and to go to school and take a history class and hear that your forefathers were slaves, I just think that that would be incredibly demoralizing...I just think it would make me feel secondary on a social level. I think that's definitely how I would feel. So I think a little help is--would be [appropriate] . . . I just imagine it would be incredibly different, I mean, although...slavery ended, what, 130 years ago? I think--I don't think that's a long time, in my opinion, to rid us of that stigma...of being a slave.

There were different perspectives, as well, on the effects of institutional racism on the development of blacks' and Latinos' capacities. For one thing, only half of the opponents of affirmative action admissions cited inadequate public school preparation for college as a contributing to inequality of outcomes among graduate professional school applicants of different races--a relationship cited by all of the advocates, who often made pointed references to the discriminatory character of differentials in public school quality and funding.

If high schools were equal, and they all taught children the same, then my assumption is that the colleges would be filled with a proportion of children exactly like the population.

The kid from [upper-middle-class suburban] Winnetka [is] trying to compete against the guy from the inner city. The school teacher there's making $65,000 a year, the school teachers here are making $21,000. You know...at second grade, [children in Winnetka are] on IBM computers, and these people are still plugging through.

I went to a Chicago public school and...my brother does now. And just--the funding isn't there....there's all this constantly cutting back. They acknowledge that there is a problem but, you know. . . . I mean, the large majority are minority students; and I honestly think people turn their back to that...crisis, because, you know, it's just the minorities....You know, screw them, basically was the attitude....Politicians would talk and everything like that, but anybody could talk a good game anyways, but it was just a bunch of b.s., the whole thing, and I honestly think they turn their back. . . . I think they're representing the white public's view. In my neighborhood, nobody sends their kids to the public schools. . . . There're a lot of non-Catholics in the neighborhood that send their children to the Catholic school...because it's a better school, period....but, in a way, you see, that's a cop out....They never attempted--I mean, they started busing minority students in there [and] people said, "Well, we're not gonna send our kids to that," mainly because out of prejudice.

Once on campus, there was general agreement, blacks or Latinos were unlikely to face overt, unequivocal hostility from whites. But advocates were more likely to validate the severity of blacks' and Latinos responses to even relatively subtle student-on-student racism, and to recognize its deleterious consequences for academic performance.

Well, [whites will] notice, like, gross miscarriages of justice and things. We don't notice everyday, um, the battle that a black and latino would go through because of the racism. You know, its' just the dirty look that they get when they walk into a store. You and I know how

we feel if--if someone that's helping us at a store, for example, treats us rudely? We're, uh, geez, what's his or her problem? And it bothers us. And you can just imagine how we'd feel to *know* why they were rude, and have to deal with that on a daily basis. . . .I--actually, I'm kind of amazed at how--now that I realize the extent to the discrimination they face, that what they've grown accustomed to doesn't bother them, and, like, what they just *expect*.

It might not always be, you know...stated outright...but, you know, I'm sure they feel it, you know--looks, things like that--because...some black people tell me, you know, about certain things that, you know, offend them and everything like that. . . . I think [racism at UIC] would probably be one of those indirect things....It wouldn't be, like, maybe somebody gave you a look or something like that, because you're a minority student, and you go home and, like, you know, feel sorry for yourself the rest of the semester and have horrible grades. But, I mean, I'm sure there is, like, you know, a lot, like, indirectly, it probably affects somebody. Even, you know, psychologically, I mean, things bother people. Things that I've encountered have bothered me, and, I mean, I can't say they affected my grades or affected any aspect of my life. Maybe, then again, they did, and I guess I never realized it.

Just one act of discrimination could very much affect everybody. In other words, like, if I walked through a campus that was mostly black...actually, even if we were in the majority and they were racist, perpetrated racist acts against some whites....just walking around through a group of blacks and all that, you would feel [hostility]...Even if...there were...[just] 10% that might be problems, you walk in front of [any of] them...you know that, like, some of those people have so much hateful thoughts and bad thoughts, and that makes you uncomfortable, that makes you not want to be there...it's not a good thing.

Indeed, advocates were more likely than opponents to consider racism generally a significant contributor to inequality of outcomes. On this issue, there was once again a categorical difference in perspective between the strongest opponents and the strongest advocates of affirmative action.

These differences of opinion seemed to reflect a more pronounced distinction on the part of opponents between extrinsic *barriers* to academic achievement--for example, financial barriers to college attendance, or the outright *exclusion* of blacks or other groups from certain jobs or certain colleges--and those psychosocial or sociocultural *obstacles* to achievement by which the effects of racism might be mediated. Put another way, opponents of affirmative action--and some of its more marginal advocates--tended to evince a more self-reliant construction of achievement motivation, in terms of which one could indeed "blame the victim."

They've just given up. It's like, well, "Hey, I'm black," you know? It's almost like--if you've ever seen the *In Living Color* [television] show where it says, "the Man," and the Man is always the *white* man. You know, its a spoof against white-dominated society. But, you know, at least in their spoof, the black person hasn't given up and he's always fighting against the Man....you know, he's trying to succeed.

No, I don't think they have *more* problems [than whites at UIC], it's the same adjustment. Coming in as a freshman you have adjustments to the college atmosphere, just as a black person does. Again, I think that a lot of the problems are created by the individual blacks themselves. If they see themselves as outcasts, they're gonna act like one.

> You've got to adjust, and if you don't, it's too God-damned bad. This is a harsh world, you know . . . if [black or Latino college students] haven't adjusted, then it's really their responsibility not to allow these other factors to get in the way of the grades or the test scores.
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> [Campus racism and other factors] could have an effect [on academic performance, but] if it does, then it's, uh...then it's a problem with the student. It's, you know, if they're gonna let that affect them...then their drive isn't there. It shouldn't--they shouldn't let it affect them.
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> Each and every group, when they went through the times of poverty in United States, went through...prejudice. And another one where there *wasn't* a time of poverty...[that is,] the Japanese Americans [during World War II].....And they suffered because of that...[But] the recipient of that...[is] the person that's creating the conflict. And then whatever follows after that, each and every person is responsible for his or her actions. . . . [The effects of racism on academic performance] depends on the person a lot. I'm pretty sure there are students that are deeply affected by this in a negative way, and I'm pretty sure that there are quite a few that would rise up to the challenge....Because it is a challenge. You know, whatever your goal is, whatever obstacles come in the way, if you are willing to achieve that goal, you will try harder.

In other words, for a young adult of *exemplary* merit--those who deserved the special status that law school or medical school or a prestigious MBA could confer--full equality of opportunity was in some sense superfluous. Once again, some of the most explicit arguments in this direction focused on the subjects themselves.

> I think [those of upper-middle-class origins] probably have an edge [over me], that they can get a head start, simply because they can afford better [undergraduate] schools. Just graduating from those schools will give them a head start in the business world. It doesn't mean they'll achieve more than I will.
>
> The things I'm going for [professionally], they're looking for more Hispanics and blacks and women now. Me, I'm a white male. I'm one of the things they just don't want right now. . . . So what I do is, I go, "All right, you don't want me? I'm gonna make myself better than the rest of them. You'll have no *choice* but to take me.
>
> The more obstacles that *I've* been faced with, the harder I've tried. It seems if you take the person who's *had* it all, and never really had to strive for anything, they have *less* motivation and drive, on the average, than the person that didn't. . . . I wouldn't have had it any other way. Because I see the people...that *don't* have to [hold a job] when they're going to school, you have someone [else] who's paying for it, and I don't think they appreciate it. Now there are those that are, you know, fed by the silver spoon and everything...that *do* take education seriously. And I don't think you should discriminate against them, just because they had it easy, 'cause maybe they *have* tried really hard. But in general, I would say the people who've gotten there because it was *easy*, [then] in the short run, it would benefit them, 'cause it'd be easy for them to get good grades. But I don't think--once life throws them a curve ball, if it ever does, I don't think that they would have the ability to deal with that as well as a person that had it harder getting there. And...I think in *that* way, it's easier for the person that *had* the obstacles to succeed, because he's always gonna have that drive, no matter what comes up...[whereas] the person that had it easy...the minute an obstacle comes around, is *not* gonna have it as easy as the person that's *been* through everything before.

Advocates of affirmative action admissions, on the other hand, tended to strike a different balance.

> It's easy for me to sit here, you know, pick yourself up by your bootstraps and, you know, get going. But it's hard for--if I was in a different person's situation, you know . . . We have sort of a privileged [life].
>
> Everybody [faces] obstacles, but I think some of the obstacles that people overcome are unduly forced on them. I mean, people look at Whoopi Goldberg. She was on welfare at one time...I think she did a really great job getting everything together. . . . [But] comin' out of that slime pit's a heck of a journey, you know. Not everybody's gonna make it who *could* make it. You know. I think it's right that we throw a rope in there and help pull them out.

Advocates and opponents alike upheld equality of opportunity in principle. But in general, the ethical and political calculus of affirmative action advocacy left more room for a *collective* obligation to maintain the kind of level playing field on which every American could "show his stuff."

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Not withstanding its limited scope and largely qualitative methodology, this study has some interesting implications regarding the nature of the affirmative action controversy. Among ordinary Americans, these findings suggest, this is not a tug of war between meritocracy and equality, or for that matter between different constructions of what "merit" is. The principle issues, rather--two sides of the same coin, really--are whether blacks and Latinos already enjoy a fair chance to achieve their potentials, and how far collective accountability must extend to ensure that they do.

Among my subjects, advocates of affirmative action had not in any sense abandoned meritocratic principles of distributive equity. On the other hand, opponents did not diverge substantially from environmentalist/structuralist interpretations of inequality of outcomes. Considering the recent resurgence among some political conservatives of hereditarian theories concerning racial differences in capacity, there is some comfort in the finding that with respect to real-world differentials in achievement potential, the most politically conservative among my subjects were at least as likely as anyone else to equate potential with drive or effort, and to agree that this kind of merit was very much a function of nurture. Indeed, one interesting source of resistance to affirmative action was the possibility that it might obviate just rewards for the merits of those *collectivities*--whether families or ethnic groups--most successful at nurturing academic and economic achievement among their young. Viewed from this perspective, affirmative action advocacy may in some sense be *more* individualistic than its opposition, whose attachment to "family values" may have a good deal to do with *the value of families* as arbiters of distribution.

No conclusions can be drawn, of course, regarding the direction of causality between policy preferences and ideological perspectives. Perhaps the second informs the first; but on the other hand, those who support or oppose affirmative action for other reasons may feel compelled to espouse--even to believe--arguments supportive of their positions. One is especially tempted to suspect bi-directionality with respect to the distribution of perspectives on racism and diversity. The links between inequality and racism, and between service quality and under-representation, may be such compelling arguments for affirmative action that those most opposed to these policies felt compelled to distance themselves from both arguments.

But in any case, a persistent tension between *normative* individualism and *positive* determinism seemed to generate a good deal of ambivalence on both sides of the issue. Among opponents, however, this tension was more likely to remain unresolved, or to yield compromise votes for supply-side alternatives. By contrast, resolutions in favor of affirmative action admissions seemed to invoke more generous constructions of the social compact, whereby both equality of opportunity and equality of access to critical goods and services were a function of relatively subjective needs, such as emotional equanimity or self-efficacy, as well as objective requirements--and whereby collective accountability embraced both. Categorical differences between strong advocates and strong opponents regarding the relationship of racism and fair representation to distributive equity, and the nature of the arguments affirming and denying these relationships, suggest that this difference in perspective on the reach or scope of the social compact may be especially critical to differences in public opinion regarding redistributive policies generally.

What should not be overlooked, however, is that affirmative action advocacy entails its own contradictions: For environmentalist-structuralist theories of inequality, which of course help to explain unequal outcomes within each racial group as well as between them, seriously undercuts the "just deserts" rationale for inequality of economic outcomes *generally*, which affirmative action per se *does not address*. In other words, affirmative action is a liberal policy with a fundamentally radical rationale--something that many of its opponents may instinctively recognize. Look closely at the rationale for affirmative action, and the notion that absolute, broad-scale equality of opportunity is both a reasonable goal of collective action and essential to optimizing individual prospects raises troubling questions concerning the situation of less-advantaged whites vis-a-vis *other whites*, challenging their sense self-efficacy, their psychological and political equanimity as surely as drug-ridden, gang-infested ghettos are thought to challenge blacks. What many white males may fear

more from affirmative action than the loss of a few jobs, or a few places in graduate school, is that the harsh glare of its logic could erase their own vision of the American dream.

What is to be done? Implications for policy

In today's political and judicial climate, affirmative action may not survive without careful placement and some judicious pruning. Policies or policy features not readily acceptable to rather *liberal* whites are unlikely to survive the present conservative backlash against affirmative action of any kind. Conversing, some arguments for affirmative action that elicit the most sympathy among opponents may point the way toward more fruitful avenues for pursuing diversity and racial equity. With this in mind, the present findings may offer policy actors some food for thought.

(1) First of all, we may need to rethink the precise character of affirmative action admissions. As things are, grade point averages and standardized test scores are rendered less significant with respect to the relative admissibility of applicants of *different* races, but retain their salience with respect to the relative ranking of applicants *within each racial group*. In other words, not only does affirmative action involve significant departures from traditional meritocratic procedures, but it is not even a *consistent* departure from traditional norms.

Whether competing against minorities or against each other, the men interviewed seemed to legitimate meritocratic selection--and meritocratic constraints on their own prospects--largely on the grounds of collective utility: The higher I rank on *these* criteria, the more I have to offer; and my failure to meet some minimal criterion cut-off means that *I can't cut it*. To a considerable extent, however, these assumptions were accepted on faith: for there were serious doubts about the concurrent and predictive validity of traditional, quantitative measures of applicants' merit.

The introduction of *different* criterion cut-offs, or different weighting of admissions criteria, *just for blacks and Latinos*--among those features of the University of Texas' policies considered most egregious by the Court of Appeals--can only undermine further the perceived legitimacy of both traditional measures and admissions process as a whole: Either whites are being held to an arbitrary standard, on the basis of essentially arbitrary criteria, or the school is indeed admitting "unqualified" blacks and Latinos. To enhance diversity while maintaining the meritocratic legitimacy of admissions decisions, it may be wise to make it known to all applicants that there are certain *absolute* criterion cut-offs below which *no one* will be admitted, and above

which greater weight will be given to a variety of relatively "qualitative" or "subjective" criteria, race included.

(2) Colleges and universities generally may also need to rethink so-called "need-blind" affirmative action admissions and financial aid policies that do not distinguish among blacks or Latinos of different socioeconomic backgrounds. White sympathies for affirmative action advocacy are *not* rooted in anti-individualistic concerns for group rights, or the desire to compensate blacks and Latinos *in general* for past and present discrimination against them. Rather, white advocacy for affirmative action seems to spring from the desire to compensate minority *individuals* for the ways in which racial discrimination has constrained or retarded the development of their potential. Such constraints, moreover, are seen to be heavily mediated by economic marginalization. Therefore blacks and Latinos who are *not* poor--or even working class--are viewed as inappropriate targets.

Often, the pursuit of "need blind" affirmative action stems in part from public outcries and regional regulatory complaints about minority retention, and appeals to the benefits of cultural diversity on campus. The easiest way to enhance black and Latino enrollments *and* graduation rates is to bring to campus those blacks and Latinos most likely to "persist to degree," i.e. the highest-achieving minority high school or college graduates, who are disproportionately middle-class in origin. But this will not wash: Racial diversity "for its own sake" is not a sufficiently compelling rationale for "reverse discrimination;" absent convincing arguments for compensatory justice, "reverse discrimination" against whites is not acceptable. If affirmative action is indeed a legitimate expression of "white guilt," we need to be very sure that our policies jibe with white constructions of their own accountability.

(3) On somewhat similar grounds, it may be injudicious for affirmative action advocates to protest too loudly race-targeted financial aid programs for medical students that are contingent on a commitment to primary-care specialties such as family practice, internal medicine, or pediatrics. While it is sometimes argued that this unfairly steers minorities away from the more lucrative specialities, it must be borne in mind that one significant argument for affirmative action at the level of graduate professional education is that economically marginalized minority communities tend to be underserved with respect to health care or legal representation. In this respect, race itself is a kind of "merit" that legitimizes racial preferences. It is unlikely, in any case, that cutbacks in such "string-attached" aid programs would be countered by increases in "no-strings-attached," racially-targeted allocations.

(4) More generally, it may be most profitable to press the case for racial equity at the level of elementary

and secondary education, through increased outreach by colleges, universities, and their graduate professional schools, and especially through greater equalization of school district funding in this country. My findings suggest a widespread understanding that it is among school children--at *that* age, and that level of schooling--that much of what we think of "merit" has its origins, both in terms of "drive," "commitment," or achievement motivation, and in terms of those fundamentals of literacy and numeracy on which subsequent academic progress is built.

Efforts toward more equitable school funding are invariably met with massive resistance. But enhancing procedural *equality* with respect to school children generally should be a much easier sell to white Americans than marginal *inequalities* on behalf of certain categories of young adult college students or college graduates. Like "liberal guilt," conservative guilt may have its uses: Those most conflicted about the justice of marginal preferences for blacks and Latinos may have a special impetus to get behind remedies for marginal preferences on behalf of upper-middle-class, suburban whites. In this manner, it should be emphasized, young people of every race would have a much better chance to "make it on their own" as equal competitors in a fair society.

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